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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000687

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/23/2018
TAGS: PREL KPAO OA
SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA: WE'LL SHOW ANOTHER 9/11 FILM FOR
BALANCE

REF: DOHA 647

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH E. LEBARON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)
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Note: This cable includes an action request. Please see
"Next Steps and Action Request" below. End Note.

(C) KEY POINTS

-- Al Jazeera aired on its main channel the Italian-produced documentary "Zero 9/11" in two parts on September 3 and 10, with an Arabic voice-over produced by Al Jazeera.

-- Contrary to the assurances of Al Jazeera Director General Wadah Khanfar (reftel), the voice-over did not discredit or offset in any way the conspiracy theories presented in the film. The voice-over simply translated into Arabic the English-language narration.

-- Contacted by PAO about this, Khanfar said, "I actually agree with you. That is why I have decided to broadcast another documentary to balance it." Apparently, Khanfar did not actually see the film before it was broadcast, despite Embassy's protests about Al Jazeera's plans to broadcast the "documentary."

-- Khanfar indicated that he had directed his staff to identify another 9/11 documentary to "balance" the first, since the first presented conspiracy theories as fact. Khanfar said he welcomed U.S. government help in identifying an appropriate documentary.

-- However, Al Jazeera's chief of acquisitions separately told us he had received no such directive from Khanfar. And he indicated that he thought another 9/11 documentary showing was unnecessary. Al Jazeera, he said, had a long history of presenting the official views on 9/11. That was "enough balance."

(C) NEXT STEPS AND ACTION REQUEST

-- Embassy intends to hold Khanfar to his word.

-- Action Request: Post requests Department's help in expeditiously identifying appropriate documentaries that accurately depict the events of 9/11.

-- In his introductory meeting with Al Jazeera Chairman Hamed bin Thamer al-Thani, Ambassador will also raise the airing of this documentary as an example of Al Jazeera's unacceptable practice of presenting two points of view completely separate from one another in context and time, and claiming this as journalistic balance.

-- Embassy will follow up and report.

End Key Points and Next Steps.

ZERO 9/11: ZERO CREDIBILITY

¶11. (SBU) The USG's Open Source Centers in Amman and Doha provided the following summary of the "Zero 9/11" documentary, an Italian-produced film that aired on Al Jazeera Arabic in two parts on September 3 and 10 in prime evening time slots:

-- The film casts doubt on the official U.S. Government version of the 9/11 events.

-- It hosts people who are considered knowledgeable in their fields, such as former pilots, physicists, metal experts and others, who all question the official version of events.

-- They first dispute the official version about the collapse of the twin towers, saying the reasons provided could not have been responsible for the collapse. Several of them speak about the possibility of an implosion or "controlled demolition."

-- The documentary then disputes the commonly accepted version of the attack on the Pentagon, saying there was no evidence a plane hit the Pentagon, as no wreckage was found and footage from "86 cameras" showed no plane.

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-- Throughout the program, screen captions, often unattributed, cast doubt on certain aspects of the official 9/11 story. The documentary refers occasionally to official statements or commonly held versions of events, but provides them largely for purposes of immediate refutation.

-- Arabic voice-over translation is provided throughout, which appears to match what the speakers are saying in the original language. (NOTE: Al Jazeera does not usually editorialize when providing translations of documentaries that it did not produce. END NOTE)

-- The press release for the film states: "ZERO: An investigation into 9/11, has one central thesis that the official version of the events surrounding the attacks on 9/11 cannot be true." As advertised, the film offers a constant attack on the results of both government and private investigations into the 9/11 attacks.

¶12. (C) Armed with this expert analysis, PAO contacted Al Jazeera Director General Wadah Khanfar on September 22 and noted that the Arabic voice-over of the documentary did not measure up to Khanfar's earlier assurances (reftel) that the narration, which was produced by Al Jazeera, would discredit the conspiracy theories put forth in the film. Khanfar replied, "I have now seen it and I actually agree with you. That is why I have decided to broadcast another documentary to balance it."

¶13. (C) Khanfar continued, "I have asked my acquisitions people to look around for a documentary that we will air to balance the views in this one." Asked if Khanfar would be willing to consider films suggested by the Embassy, he replied that such assistance would be "most welcome."

¶14. (C) Separately, PAO contacted Zeidoun al-Badri, Al Jazeera Documentary channel's chief of acquisitions, and asked if he had any plans to purchase and air a 9/11 documentary that accurately portrays the attacks, contrary to what was represented in "Zero 9/11." Al-Badri replied that he was aware of no such plans and that, in his view, Al Jazeera had already presented a "balanced view" on 9/11 in keeping with

the company's motto, "The Opinion and the other Opinion."

¶ 15. (C) Every year since 2001, Al-Badri claimed, Al Jazeera has run documentaries that capture the official version of events, including from victims' families, eyewitnesses and government officials. "Zero 9/11" was the first documentary that Al Jazeera has run presenting only conspiracy theories, he asserted. Al-Badri noted that his office had "excellent relationships with American film distributors" and that if "something new comes out, we would be willing to consider it." In that vein, like Khanfar, he welcomed Embassy's suggestions of other 9/11-centered films.

LeBaron